

# Francoist Spain's Aircraft and Pilot Support to Egypt and Syria

During the 1950s–1970s, Francoist Spain's covert support for Arab states went beyond land-based arms. Though officially aligned with the United States through the 1953 Pact of Madrid, Spain maintained a parallel relationship with Arab nationalist states like Egypt under Nasser and Syria under the Ba'ath regime. This included limited but symbolically important transfers of aircraft and even Spanish pilots.

## **Spanish Aircraft Sales:**

- In the mid-1950s, Spain delivered several CASA-built aircraft to Egypt, including trainers and light transports.
- Reports from U.S. intelligence in the 1960s noted negotiations between Egypt and Spain for the supply of jet trainers. The CASA 101 jet trainer (developed later in the 1970s) was preceded by earlier aircraft types Spain offered abroad.
- Some Francoist proposals involved selling HA-200 Saeta jet trainers (a Hispano Aviación aircraft developed with Messerschmitt's Willy Messerschmitt after WWII). Egypt already operated license-built HA-200s (locally produced as the 'Al-Qahira') and Spain provided spare parts and technical assistance.

## **Spanish Pilots and Advisors:**

- Spanish pilots and air instructors were quietly sent to Egypt in the 1960s to help train Egyptian Air Force cadets on Spanish-built trainers.
- Several Nazi and ex-Luftwaffe pilots who had taken refuge in Spain were later dispatched as "civilian" advisors to Egypt and Syria. These included technical consultants for jet aircraft and air defense.
- CIA reports from the late 1960s indicated Spanish air instructors played a role in training Arab pilots on the HA-200 and other European aircraft, though Madrid kept this secret to avoid angering Washington.

## **Political and Strategic Context:**

- Spain attempted to balance its dependence on U.S. economic and military aid with its ideological and political courting of Arab states. Supporting Egypt and Syria with aircraft and pilots symbolized this policy.
- For Egypt, acquiring Spanish jets and pilot expertise supplemented Soviet deliveries, offering diversification of suppliers.
- For Syria, Spanish support (mainly advisors) added Western technical input to a Soviet-dominated arsenal.
- The U.S. regarded Spanish assistance to Arab air forces as disruptive, especially given Spain's role as a NATO-linked base host, and protested discreetly.

Though smaller in scale compared to Spain's sale of artillery, recoilless rifles, and tanks, the transfer of Spanish aircraft, training assistance, and pilots to Egypt and Syria highlighted Franco's strategy of Arab outreach. These acts reinforced Spain's image as a defender of Arab causes while also complicating its relationship with Washington during the Cold War.